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THE LIMITS OF MEDIÆVAL GUIDANCE.

"We do not serve the dead—the past is past!
God lives, and lifts His glorious mornings up
Before the eyes of men, awake at last.

Casa Guidi Windows, Mrs. Browning.

THE reform movements of the modern Pre-Raphaelites has been mistaken for an attempted revival of mediæval Art. The mistake is made by persons wholly ignorant of the spirit, both of mediæval and of modern Pre-Raphaelite Art. To thoughtless minds the term "Pre-Raphaelite" might, at first, appear to indicate a retrograde movement; but we find men who are not considered thoughtless or unintelligent in these matters falling into the same error, whether from honest shallowness of perception, or from wilful obstinacy, I do not attempt to determine.

Prof. Hart, of the Royal Academy of England, closes a lecture before the students of that Institution, by referring "to an eccentric art-course, which has been the subject of some conflicting opinions of late." He goes on to say, "There have been periods in the History of Art, as in Letters, when certain minds, as if wearied, under some morbid influence, with the contemplation of high models, have chosen to fall back on some earlier condition of progress, and perversely taken up a backward starting-point, from whence a portion of the road to excellence was needlessly to be traveled over again. Of all the forms of eccentricity into which the love of paradox and the passion for novelty are apt to seduce mankind, this is surely one of the most illogical and uneconomical. If the servile imitation of even perfect models be, as I have said, a thing to be shunned, what shall we say to an imitation which deliberately selects for its models comparative imperfection? The disciples of this school of artists flourish on contradictions. They seek to become conspicuous by a dip among the shadows of the earlier centuries. Their attempt at novelty is made by a return to what is ancient. The bad thus made new they exalt above the beauty that has grown old; and they challenge the logic of the schools in the name of an anachronism."

It is an old maxim that men should speak of that only concerning which they are informed; yet, alas! how little is this regarded by a teacher or required by his hearers. It seems almost absurd to suppose that a professor of the Royal Academy should be ignorant of early Italian art; much more of the modern Pre-Raphaelite work immediately around him. Yet, if we are to judge from his own words, he is totally ignorant of both.

Modern Pre-Raphaelite art is as far from being an imitation of early Italian art, as light is from darkness. Mr. Ruskin, in a note to his Pamphlet on Pre-Raphaelitism, says: "The current fallacy of society, as well as of the press, was, that the Pre-Raphaelites imitated the *errors* of early painters. A falsehood of this kind could not have obtained credence anywhere but in England, few English people, comparatively, having ever seen a picture of early Italian masters. If they had, they would have known that the Pre-Raphaelite pictures are just as superior to the early Italian in skill of manipulation, power of drawing and knowledge of effect, as inferior to them in grace of design; and that, in a word, there is not a shadow of resemblance between the two styles. The Pre-Raphaelites imitate no pictures: they paint from nature only."

The young men of England who started this movement called themselves "Pre-Raphaelite" because they saw that the painters of that period were actuated by worthiness of aim and put their whole strength into their work. It was the *spirit* of the early workmen that they resolved should actuate them, (i. e. the spirit of truth.) The *manifestation* of that spirit they knew of course would be as different in the nineteenth century from what it was in the fourteenth, as the institutions and requirements of the respective ages differ. The new movement is directed against conventional shallowness and imbecile affectation,—it is a

stern appeal to truth. Whatever a man does with his whole strength, provided his motive be worthy, will be good and useful. If a man have high artistic talent or genius, his work will be valuable in the degree in which he worthily applies his whole strength. First the earnest purpose, then the calm, deliberate, persevering effort.

It seems plain enough that upon these principles alone, can any noble art exist, yet it is just as true that during the last three centuries the arts have been governed by principles directly opposite to these.

From the time of Giotto in the early part of the fourteenth century, to the time of Raphael at the close of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries, art was the true expression of the delight of sincere minds in God's truth. Awkward in expression as their works were at first, yet the intense purpose and graceful conception could never be mistaken by a mind capable of receiving noble emotion. By degrees they became more skillful in the science of art and it is interesting to note the progress of the technical part so long as it was kept rightly subordinate to the proper motive. But finally pride came in the way and soon destroyed the purity of art and reduced it to a minister to low passions. As greater mechanical skill was acquired the artist began to exult in his achievements, and thus what before was noble as a means became contemptible as an end; moreover, these technical acquirements, instead of being rightly employed upon noble religious subjects, were brought into the service of profane themes, a love of which had been inspired by unintelligent study of classical art.

It is important to understand that the degradation of art began when the artist began to glory *in himself*,—when he began to feel pride in his own skill and used every means to display it above all else.

It is a great mistake to suppose, as many do, that it was the increasing knowledge and love for nature that caused the decline of early art. It was the intense feeling for nature and truth of fact which the early painters displayed under all their awkwardness, that constituted their greatness. Their

expression of certain *external* truths were less skillful than in more modern times, yet the grace and truth of the spirit of their work has not been equaled except perhaps in one or two instances of the modern Pre-Raphaelite work. Giotto was a naturalist, Leonardo Da Vinci was a naturalist, Paul Veronese was a naturalist. No mistake can therefore be greater than to suppose that natural truth degraded the school. Rio, in his "Poetry of Christian Art" says "Naturalism was the cause of the degradation of early Italian Art:" but the truth is that it was *pride* of naturalism together with sensualism.

Now if we study early Italian Art carefully we shall find that it is remarkable above all else for *truth*. And if we study modern Pre-Raphaelite or Naturalistic Art carefully we shall find it chiefly remarkable for truth. So that in this the schools are alike, though the difference between the two in manifestation of truth could not be conceived except it were seen.

In writing of "Giotto and his works in Padua" Mr. Ruskin says,—"The Giottesque movement in the fourteenth, and the Pre-Raphaelite movement in the nineteenth centuries, are precisely similar in bearing and meaning, both being the protests of vitality against mortality, of spirit against letter, and of truth against tradition: and both, which is the more singular, literally links in one unbroken chain of feeling, for exactly as Nicola Pisano and Giotto were helped by the classical sculptures discovered in their time, the P. R.'s have been helped by the works of Nicola and Giotto at Pisa and Florence: and thus the fiery cross of truth has been delivered from spirit to spirit over the dust of intervening generations."

Pre-Raphaelite art stands preeminent for truth of conception; it remains for modern art to unite singleness of aim and purity of earnest purpose with the acquirements of modern science.*

Modern P. R. art is not an attempted revival of mediæval art; there is a vast difference between servilely imitating and wisely profiting by the spirit of its teachings. We want the mediæ-

* I use the word science only as concerned with art,—The science of aspects and the mere technical part.

val spirit of fervor—that pure faith in divine things, in place of our shallow hypocrisy and infidelity. In the old time the painter considered his office to be that of a spiritual teacher, hence the words of Buffalmacco, a pupil of Giotto:—"We painters occupy ourselves entirely in tracing saints on the walls and on the altars in order that by this means men, to the great despite of the demons, may be more drawn to virtue and piety." At the same time the painters established a confraternity and held meetings "to offer up thanks and praises to God."

Since these early times art has improved in outward show, but has grown hollow within. As the apparel of the body became more gorgeous the ornaments of the soul were suffered to tarnish and grow dim. We have the lamps most beautifully polished, but they contain no oil. And religious art has become like a "whited sepulchre."

The great lesson that we moderns learn from the early men is truth of aim. Beyond this we may not safely go with them. If we attempt to follow further we become false to the first principle. It does not follow that because we love their work we must follow their modes of expression. As

soon as we do this we become slaves to error,—our aim is no longer for truth, and we shall be following in the path of those who cannot see or feel for themselves.

Our work ought not to look anything like early art. We do not live under the same circumstances as those early men. We cannot honestly paint the kind of subjects that they did; for we have no belief in the superstitions which actuated them. Of all varieties of affectation, this is the most easily seen through by any one who thinks at all in the matter, and for this reason the works of Overbeck and Ary Sheffer and a host of other misguided enthusiasts of later times will stand to the world as long as they last monuments of hypocrisy. "Every painter ought to paint what he himself loves, not what others have loved; if his mind be pure and sweetly toned, what he loves will be lovely; if otherwise, no example can guide his selection no precept govern his hand." Let each one use his own faculties and

"Through the blue Immense,
Strike out, all swimmers! Cling not in the way
Of one another, so to sink; but learn
The stronger man's impulse, catch the fresh'ning
spray."

NOTICES OF RECENT PICTURES.

BIERSTADT'S "ROCKY MOUNTAINS."

Mr. Bierstadt's much talked-of picture of Rocky Mountain Scenery, after having been shown for one evening to a few invited guests, and, then, snatched away to Boston where it was the object during several weeks of an almost unprecedented *furor*, has at last been unveiled to the long expecting New York public. It is at present going through the ceremonies of exhibition and puffery preparatory to being engraved, which have now become settled by prescription, and with which all New Yorkers are thoroughly familiar; the upholsterer has done his work, the tin lognettes and the magnifying glass have been duly provided, the puff-disinterested has been written, printed on the sheet of letter-paper that etiquette prescribes, and distributed, and the gen-

tleman-in-waiting stands ready, at all hours, to enter in his subscription-book the names of those who desire to add this combined result of Mr. Bierstadt's genius and Mr. Smillie's talent, to their plethoric portfolios.

We have no desire to satirize what, no doubt, has been found, by experience, to be the best way of managing the business of selling pictures. But, still, when we see this vast machinery of advertisement and puffery put in motion, and on an equally ponderous scale for all sorts of pictures, good, bad and indifferent, we cannot help contrasting the new way with the old, and wishing that we had a man strong enough to draw the world to him and make it seek him out, instead of there being need of all this apparatus to force the world to look at what it would often never seek of its own will. When the